

## Chapter 5- Crucifixion and Resurrection

'Reading John's account of Jesus' death and resurrection in the context of the Gospel as a whole discloses multiple dimensions of meaning', says K. (p.109) and who could argue with that? It is patently true. So K. naturally moves into a discussion of the significance of Jesus' crucifixion, first, under the heading of 'Love in Human Terms' (p. 110). 'Connecting the footwashing to the crucifixion enables readers to see that the love Jesus shows in a preliminary way by washing feet, he gives in a definitive way by laying down his life' (p. 111). Again, true. So K. next makes way into the deep waters of Jesus' death as sacrifice for sin, victory over evil, and revelation of divine glory. Koester remarks 'Put briefly, if the signs reveal God's glory by displaying divine power, the crucifixion reveals God's glory by conveying divine love' (p. 122) which may resonate with Christians but always, doesn't it, leave one wondering about God's love for the Son. 'If glory defines what the crucifixion is, the crucifixion defines what glory is' (Ibid.) which sounds very nice but leaves one pining for more substance. The latter part seems fairly self evident- but the former raises questions. How does glory define the crucifixion?

Having handled, quite well for the most part, the question of the theological meaning of the crucifixion so far as John is concerned, K. moves forward to the resurrection. 'The message of resurrection is that the relationship with Jesus that begins now, in faith, has a future through the believer's own resurrection' (p. 123). This is certainly the way John must have seen it, as K. shows by copious examples.

What I found most interesting in Koester's discussion here is his apparent 'minimalism' historically speaking. A 'minimalism' which he finds (rightly I must add) in John himself. 'Mary's story shows that seeing the tomb, seeing the angels, and even seeing Jesus himself do not guarantee faith... According to John, faith is not based on inferences drawn from an empty tomb. If there is to be resurrection faith, it must arise from an encounter with the risen Jesus himself.... The reports *about* the risen Jesus evoke faith when they are made effective *by* the risen Jesus' (p. 126-127).

Un-existentialized faith is no faith at all. And that is precisely what 'historically based' faith is.

Finally, Koester does a fine job of pointing out the meaning of the resurrection for hope for the future. 'What is the significance of Jesus' resurrection for those who face the prospect of their own deaths?' (p. 130). A question which he takes pains to answer in the remainder of the chapter. Interestingly, K. remarks in this connection, '... the Gospel does not say that Jesus' "flesh" is resurrected, since Jesus is not brought back to mortal life' (p. 132)! '...The embodied Jesus is not subject to the limitations of the flesh, since he comes to the disciples wherever they are, even behind closed doors' (p. 132). Koester clearly does not hold to some sort of vulgar 'resuscitation' theory of resurrection.

## Chapter Six- The Spirit

This chapter can scarcely be described as brief, but it can be dispensed with (in the most positive sense of the phrase) with little ado. It is what it advertises- i.e., a discussion of John's theology of the Holy Spirit who, in essence, carries on in the church the work which Jesus carried on in the flesh. And though Koester asserts that John has an 'intriguing perspective on the work of God's Spirit' (p. 133). that's hardly the case. John's view is through and through 'Pauline' just as Paul's view is 'Johannine'.

Koester is clearly correct when he says that the Spirit (in John) 'evokes faith', 'discloses the presence of the risen Christ', and 'empowers the community to discern the significance of Jesus and to bear witness to him' (p. 134). The rest of the chapter fleshes out (no pun intended) the work of the Spirit as described under those three headings.

I don't want anyone, though, to think I'm giving the chapter short shrift. Nein! But it really adds nothing to the discussion and doesn't take us 'forward' in what we know of John's theology.

## **Chapter Seven- Faith, Present and Future**

'If people are created for life, they will seek whatever they think will bring it. The issue is not *whether* people will seek life -- that is a given. The issue is *where* their pursuit of life will take them and where their faith will be centered' (p. 161). So begins K's discussion of this central issue to the theology of the Fourth Gospel. He remarks somewhat emphatically, 'Characters in the Gospel respond to the signs with genuine faith if they have already been brought to faith by what they have heard from or about Jesus' (p. 164). Faith precedes correct apprehension of 'the signs' Jesus performs. Without faith, said 'signs' are meaningless or at best ambiguous.

Koester illuminates the centrality of faith by explaining the story of the man born blind and Lazarus, and then observes quite insightfully 'Through the Gospel the signs of Jesus come to readers in verbal form. The signs are made visible through the words of the Gospel. Readers need not look elsewhere for wonders to believe in. They find in John's text the words and works of Jesus that call them to faith' (p. 170).

Moving forward, Koester examines in a bit of detail the story of the Samaritan woman and then, I believe, makes a serious misstep when he writes in connection with 'present and future life' the following: 'By analogy, those who sleep in death remain in the care of God until they are awakened to life in Christ on the last day' (p. 182) which is nothing less than the old misunderstanding called 'soul sleep'. After that sentence K offers no further explanation and I certainly wish he had. I don't believe either John or the other writers of the New Testament adopted such a conception; yet Koester leaves the impression that John did.

## **Chapter Eight- Discipleship in Community and World**

The final chapter of Koester's fascinating volume addresses the key issue of the ongoing presence of Jesus among his followers, the community of faith, the Church. 'Studies of John's perspective on discipleship, moral formation, and ethics usually focus on this command to love ... But the Gospel also includes other images, which help readers work out the implications of what Jesus' command might mean' (p. 188). And what are these images? 'Walking in the Light', 'A Seed Falling to the Earth', 'Wash One Another's Feet', 'Abiding in the Vine -- and Bearing Fruit for Others'. Each of these themes enjoys Koester's sharp insight and attention. He then turns to the images used by John to describe the Christian Community, such as 'family', 'friends', and 'flock'.

The book concludes with an important foray into the 'exclusivity' of the Christian claim (i.e., that Jesus is 'The Way'. There is no access to the Father apart from this Way. 'No one has any innate ability to overcome the separation and go to the Father, but the Father can do what human beings cannot by providing the way' (p. 213). '... The message of the cruciform love of God that calls any and all to faith and life. This is the purpose for which John's Gospel was written' (p. 214).

The benefit of Koester's work is that he has the gift of clarity and simplicity without suffering the disease of so many scholars who are burdened as well with irrelevancy. This book deserves quite wide attention and will reward its readers quite nicely.